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The Right to Freedom

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INTIMIDATION

Belarusan authorities stayed a number of repressions against organisers of presidential elections, scheduled by the Supreme Soviet for May 16...

Analysing the state of things in Kosovo and Serbia after the first NATO bombing, a lot of political correspondents ask themselves: who is the winner and who is the looser as a result of the broken hostilities? So far we may come one unquestionable conclusion: Slabadan Miloshevich, President of Serbia, is the only to be the gainer. Not long ago thousands of people had come in the street for the whole month and demanded his resignation, demanded to have democratic elections. Nowadays it may seems that all Serbs, irrespective of their political views, united around «their President» driven by a common patriotic feeling. Internal Serbia problems seem to have moved back, to have been lost in appeals to struggle against «American aggressors». The Opposition is not heard at all...

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CHRONICLE

On March 11, Kanstantsin Viartseika, a member of the Peasant Party and representative of the initiative group on Mikhail Chygir's nomination for the office of president, was detained by policemen in the town of Belaziorsk (Biaroza district, Brest region). He was detained while collecting the signatures for Mikhail Chygir and then brought to the prosecutor's office, where he was warned by prosecutor Kurylevich.

On March 12, the prosecutor of the Central district of Gomel Yemel'yanenka warned Viktar Artsiukh for taking part in the sitting of the local branch of the Free trade union, where the question of the district election commission's membership on presidential elections was considered.

On March 12, I.Smagin, G.Zhuk, M.Aksionaw and A.Katsapava, the members of the Gomel commission on presidential elections, were summoned to the prosecutor's office «to give explanations».

On March 13, a picket was held in Navapolatsk devoted to the Constitution's day. It was organised by representatives of the local council of the BPF «Adradzhennie». People taking part in the picketing held placards saying «We have the right to elections!» «Belarus is a free country!» «Presidential elections are to be held on May 16!»

On March 15, Mikola Sulima, a chairman of the local council of the BPF «Adrazhennie», was detained while collecting the signatures in Belaziorsk (Brest region). He was warned by the prosecutor's office.

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Events. Facts. Comments

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On March 14, member of the BPF «Adradzhennie» Yury Pchel'nikaw was detained at 18 o'clock in Nepakoranyia avenue in Magiliow. He was searched and then brought to the Magiliow Kastrychnitsky district's Department of Internal Affairs to find out his personality, where he had been kept for 3 hours. He was confiscated printed documents, among them were papers with signatures for Zyanon Paznyak, fly-sheets, saying «Paznyak paves the way for Belarus to Europe», fly-sheets with information about the Belarusan People's Republic. Yury Pchel'nikaw refused to sign the report drawn up by the policemen. He has been accused for breaking the article 173 (p.3) of the Administrative Code (distribution of printed editions, which were published with breaking the established order and without imprinted data, containing the information aimed at doing harm to public order, to the rights and legal interests of citizens).

On March 15, Zmitser Salawiow and Aleg Pashkevich were detained in Navapolatsk at 9 o'clock p.m. The formal ground for detention was that they were collecting the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak. Policemen demanded that they should put down the explanation about their activities. In response to the question asked by Z.Salawiow and A.Pashkevich why they were detained policemen told that they looked like robbers wanted by police...

On March 15, the members of the local commission on presidential elections were summoned to the prosecutor's office in Baranavichy (Brest region). Balyaslaw Bolbat, a member of the Belarusan Social-Democratic Party «Narodnaya Gramada», the members of the Belarusan Popular Front «Adradzhennie» Uladzimir Gowsha, Georgii Zagorski, Tamara Zverava, Mikhas' Barysevich and the chairman of the local council of the BPF «Adradzhennie» Mikalai Severtsaw were among detained people. Deputy prosecutor Kvashnin warned them and told that in case they had carried on their activities in the commission on presidential elections they would have been brought to book.

On March 15, A.A.Prasnyakow, deputy prosecutor of the Savetsky district of Gomel, officially warned Anatol' Paplawski, an active member of the BPF and the Central city commission on presidential elections. Anatol' Paplawski was explained that in case he had continued his activities he would have been brought to book.

On March 15, Mikola Klimovich, a member of the BPF, was summoned to the prosecutor's office of the Kastrychnitski district of Minsk. Prosecutor Zhukavets led a discussion with M.Klimovich about the activities of the district commission on presidential elections.

On March 16, in Vitsebsk a trial under well known opposition activist – member of the Vitsebsk council of the BPF «Vybar» (Choice) – Uladzimir Pleshchanka began. He was accused of being involved in the case of disappearance of the bust to the Russian commander Suvorov. He was charged with breaking the articles 201 (p.1) and 225 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (intentional hooliganism and destruction of historical and cultural monuments). The public of the city showed interest in the case. There were no free sits in the court room. Nadzeya Dudarava, an observer of the OSCE in Belarus and representatives of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» Ales Byalatsky and Valyantsin Stefanovich in capacity of public defenders were present at the trial. It should be mentioned that 50-year old U.Pleshchanka has already been in custody for seven months. The state of his health has considerably worsened for this period. During his speech U.Pleshchanka stated that he was not being accused of hooliganism but of his political view points and public activities. It became clear during the court sitting that there was no accusatory resolution in the court. To be exact U.Pleshchanka had only the first page of this document in triplicate. So the judge was forced to stop the court sitting and put off the trial on March 26. The barrister and public defenders insisted on immediate release of U.Pleshchanka on condition of giving written undertaking not to leave the city, but in vain.

On March 11, Zmitser Abramovich, a representative of the Belarus an Social-Democratic Party and a member of the initiative group on Mikhail Chygir's nomination for presidential office, was detained and then brought to the local Administration of Internal Affairs in Barysaw (Minsk region). They drew up a report saying that Z.Abramovich broke the article 167 (p.3) (breaking the legislature on elections) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus. Next day he was detained again by policemen while collecting the signatures for M.Chygir. But this time policemen decided not to draw up a new report. On March 17 Z.Abramovich was again detained but this time by the officials of the Committee on State Security (KGB). The chairman of the Barysaw department of the Administration of the Committee on State Security for Minsk and Minsk region S.M.Litsvinchyk officially warned Z.Abramovich saying «for activities which might cause amenability provided by the article 61 (p.1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (a plot aimed at seizure of power by unconstitutional means)». The aforesaid article provides amenability up to 12-year term of imprisonment with property confiscation or without it. In spite of intimidations Zmitser that same day went on collecting the signatures.

On March 17, Ales Picula, a chairman of the local council of the «Young Front», was detained by unknown people wearing civil clothes in Baranavichy at 17.00 p.m. while collecting the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak. The unknown people did not introduce themselves that is why Ales Picula put up resistance. They beaten him severely and dragged him by force to the car, where he was threatened and led a discussion about his political activities. Having driven him round the town they released him without drawing up a report. Ales Picula appealed with complaint to the local prosecutor's office. On March 25 he got a response by the chairman of the Baranavichy Department of Internal Affairs lieutenant-colonel S.Mostyk (a copy of this document was submitted to the prosecutor of the town) saying «the appeal lodged by Mr. A.V.Picula to institute a criminal case can not be satisfied in compliance with the article 5 (p.2) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (a lack of corpus delicti). The search of people who have beaten you on March 17 goes on. In case you don't agree with this decision you can appeal against it in the prosecutor's office of the town of Baranavichy».

On March 17, in the town of Gantsavichy (Brest region) the member of the BPF «Adradzhennie» and well known human rights activist Mikalai Zan'ka was sentenced to 10 days in administrative detention. The reason was as follows. On March 17 Mikalai Zan'ka was present at court hearings in the court room, where the case about rehabilitation of Sviatlana Varvashevich at her work was considered. When judge Budnik went out to the judge's room to make final decision Mikalai Zan'ka chanced to be a witness of a gross infringement of the law. He saw that the district's prosecutor Siargei Turavets, who didn't participate in consideration of this case, was handing over the folder with the case of Sviatlana Varvashevich to the chairman of the court. Then Mikalai and his friends saw the court's secretary Natallia Muha passing this folder from the chairman of the court back to the judge Budnik, who took it and went into the sitting room to announce a verdict. Mikalai Zan'ka claimed to stop the law breaking... As a result he was detained by policemen called by the judge and got his term.

On March 17, the fire began in the editorial office of a local independent newspaper in Navapolatsk (Vitsebsk region) at 22.30 p.m. «Khimik» (Chemist). Unknown persons set the door of the office on fire. It should be mentioned that the newspaper published opposition materials and a number of articles, which criticised the activities of local authorities. The local authorities tried to destroy this independent issue by uniting the newspaper's editorial staff with that one of the newspaper «New paper». Members of the editorial staff of the newspaper «Khimik» told that they received a lot of threatening anonymous telephone calls. The facts that were mentioned above give the reason to think that the editorial office was set on fire not occasionally and was aimed at further intimidation of members of the editorial staff of the independent newspaper.

On March 18, at Magiliow's Central District Court the under aged member of the «Young Front» Ales' Pawtaratsky stood the trial. The day before he had been detained while collecting the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak nomination for presidential office. The judge Saroka fined him for 250 000 roubles according to article 167 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus. The judge refused to allow Valadar Zurupanaw to be a public defender on the trial. It seems very strange that Ales' Pawtaratsky stood the trial in court. According to the articles 167 (p.3) and 201 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus the cases of such kind are to be considered by regional committees on the cases of under aged persons. In spite of this the judge decided that 16- year old Ales' Pawtaratsky was old enough to consider his case in the court.

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VICTAR GANCHAR

«I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE FATE OF MY COUNTRY...»


Victar GANCHAR

A wide campaign aimed at conducting the presidential elections scheduled by the 13th Supreme Soviet for May 16, 1999 gave cause for rigid measures and repressions against the organisers of the elections. It goes without saying, that Victar Ganchar, a chairman of the Central Election Committee was one of the first to be arrested. After a 10-day arrest, he was instituted criminal proceedings under Art. 190 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (unauthorised appropriation of a post or power by an official). But Victar Ganchar can't be easily intimidated...

— Mr. Ganchar, how are you now? In spite of the fact that your hunger-strike in the custody centre was not long ago, I heard you came back to your work?

— You know, least of all I enjoy talking about my health and it's perhaps typical of any man of business. Of course I've already started to work, firstly because the schedule of elections campaign is so rough from the point of succession of activities that even if doctors strongly recommended me to avoid any contacts I had to carry on working. On Monday (the 4th day after the hunger-strike) there was a big meeting with regional elections committees chairmen with participation of leaders of initiative groups of candidates for Presidential office, V.Shlyndzikaw and S.Papkow. We discussed the problems connected with electoral districts, district commissions as well as confirmation of district and regional commissions. I don't want the work of members of initiative groups to be wasted in these abnormal circumstances.

— Have you ever been suggested to leave Belarus – forever or as they say «temporarily, when a democracy wins»? Have you ever thought about it?

— I had such suggestions, and many time; I had no intentions, as to my professional experience I indeed had a lot of proposals. On a Belarusan scale, I had fantastic contracts. Of course, I answered some of these professional proposals, because life is life and any man apart from everything has to provide the family. For example, from July to December last year I worked under a contract in Latvia, in the Association of Commercial banks, where I was appointed to be an arbitrator. But I have never thought of leaving Belarus for ever and on the whole from the point of its practical application is absurd because I'm from 50s, I grew up in that atmosphere and I can't imagine myself somewhere abroad. I simply love my Motherland and the whole question sounds odd to me. To make it shorter I won't be able to live in any other country.

— Your act inspired many people. What can you say to them now?

— In fact I had no choice. It was an act, as you call it, which had no alternatives. Unfortunately, there wasn't any other way of protecting human rights, political and human dignity. Taking into consideration that I faced it eye to eye. I'm sorry for my language, but I faced with inhuman attitude and with entirely sadistic system of suppression of dignity (it was, perhaps, a political aim and in the form of an applied one – to suppress me as a personality) I wouldn't like to use such grand words as «a heroic deed» or simply a «deed». There were no alternatives and maybe by this fact I can explain why I didn't suffer much during all these 10 days and this decision was rather simple.

— So, you had been ready for that even earlier, hadn't you?

— To my mind I was ready long ago. Unfortunately only my strong body wasn't completely ready, that's why on the 4th – 5th day my will power was becoming stronger and stronger. The organism started to fir me – I mean those the most hard days when I was suffering from spasm and unfortunately I had fits one after another. Nevertheless even in this critical situation I had no choice. I refused so-called forced medical aid, offered by doctors from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It was absolutely unacceptable.

— The regime got scared of your possible death or future repercussions, didn't it? In general, personal repressions against Victar Ganchar mean to admit you the most dangerous enemy or personal revenge of the former, let's say, companion.

— I believe there is truth in the first, in the second and the third points. Knowing Lukashenka's peculiarities, who is indeed ready to do everything to preserve his power (as it's known it's more of a mental problem) – it maybe a personal revenge. But the main prevailing argument is – simple fear and panic which influenced the decisions of the officials. But in reality the decisions were made at level of Lukashenka and Sheyman. As a result – inadequate or even belated actions. For example, two days were necessary to make decisions about forced feeding, because even on Wednesday, the specialists realised that I was in a critical state. And perhaps as no one could decide (it was Lukashenka and Sheyman's prerogative) two days were necessary to make this inadequate, not to be rude, crazy decision from the point of medical tests. It's not by chance that on the eve of that decision Udovikaw, first deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, and Tarletsky, chairman of city militia and of city department of Internal Affairs of the Minsk City Executive Committee appeared in my cell. Their visit was vivid example of all that. Udovikaw, who had been shoulder to shoulder with me for 5 years when a deputy of the 12th Supreme Soviet, entered the cell and cried: «Get up!» – and after my cell- mates jumped up , had a quick look at me and rushed out of it. This general psychological atmosphere accompanied my detention in the cell. That's why it's not by chance that such an incredible decision was made: to put an end to the hunger-strike by force, with the help of special troops in black masks. In this connection I think that the people who were making such decisions were overwhelmed by fear and panic... Of course, it's unbelievable that they were worried about my state of health. They were afraid that there would be an information drain, a terrible scandal – which could inevitably lead to a crash of that extraordinary power. I stress: extraordinary, as its activities can't be explained using common sense.

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«I'M WORRIED ABOUT THE FATE OF MY COUNTRY...»

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— People in civil who appeared in cell, who were on duty on floors – it's obviously not only an attempt to prevent an information drain. Have you noticed that not only cell-mates treated you differently but the guards, militia and all the staff, who was in Akrestsin Street as well?

— The most interesting is that during these 10 days in the custody centre were the witnesses of a real socially-psychological revolution. As compared to the first three days in the custody centre when there was bad language, humiliation of human dignity, but during the last week it looked like mutual relations between people in the spa. Not from the point of living conditions, but from relations between people. The fact that three members of the Central Elections Commissions (as S.Abadowsky was at once released because of his health) changed the atmosphere, climate and even the relations between people, I value it not less than all real political and moral consequences of our arrest. To say nothing that those people who have never shown interest in politics, considered the appearance of newspapers, and information concerning the reaction to our actions in the custody centre, to be more important than getting a parcel, which used to be main and basic. I don't want you to think that I exaggerate because they used to ask for two things through a ventilator system: cigarettes and newspapers.

— Soon a speculator in foreign currency will write memoirs «How I did time with Ganchar!»

— Now you are speaking ironically about it, but meanwhile your ironic remark repeats the words of those who were serving time with me. One of them, unemployed, who makes money by odd jobs, said: «Now I will be able to say in Chygladze Street that I was doing time with political prisoners!» The only thing he asked was to leave the newspapers which Shchukin used to hand from time to time in Akrestsina street. As to a worker from «Horizont» Amalgamation , he said: «I'm very pleased that I found myself here by chance after a home quarrel with my wife: here I realised a new standard of living». I don't exaggerate. I speak about it with honour, and the members of the Central Election Commission Gyunter and Gurinovich behaved quite decently. We indeed did a psychological revolution.

— «One of the most civilised parties in Ukraine (a definition given by the newspaper «Nasha Niva») People's democratic party, expressed its intention to support an elections campaign and to send its observers to the elections, scheduled for May 16. What other political movements expressed their intentions to support the elections after the arrest of the Central Elections Commission?

— If so happened that the arrest of the members of the Central Election Commission made the process more active that from the political view point one couldn't expect more. Now some of my colleagues speak ironically that indeed they should be grateful to those who made such – I'm sorry for my language, I have to repeat once again – crazy decisions. They provoked great interest to the events in Belarus, it means that they really contribute to informative campaign in favour of elections. Nowadays we see the real results of those events. I believe that the intentions of the mentioned party – is the first one as nowadays the situation in Belarus is being examined quite seriously by all European structures. Of course you know about the resolution of the European Parliament and I reckon that after the registration of all candidates we will face a new political reality in Belarus, when the participation of international observers will be inevitable. It's possible to predict the result of examination and analysis in Belarus: On May 16, 1999 at the elections we will have a lot of international observers.

— Is there a threat of repressions for them?

— It's Lukashenka's concern.

— You have already told that a dry hunger-strike was for you quite natural, you didn't hesitate. But I'd like to know what encouraged you: pragmatism, defence of your natural dignity – or it was a struggle for democracy?

— In fact it was a forced choice. I didn't hesitate, because I had made the choice earlier. As to the things which encouraged me, of course everything was in it. I realised that this local incident was significant for the whole election campaign. I realised that in case they had managed to suppress me as a chairman of the Central Commission, the election campaign would have been stopped. But I clearly saw its significance for my country, it was its last chance. To make it short I was pushed by all these things. It's a defence of my carrier dignity, defence of my national dignity and simply a defence of my personal man's dignity. Taking into consideration all these motives, sometimes even unnatural (because quite rarely you have to defend your dignity by threatening your life and health), the choice was simple, natural, in the sense, that I hadn't the problem with the choice.

— Earlier mainly youth from Malady front dared to starve, that's why your choice for most of people was unexpected. «We haven't had any ideas that Mr. Ganchar is so nationally-minded». Will you tell a few words about your national identity?

— When the problem of national identity arises, it surprises me a little. Every man, from the point of so widespread popular social psychology, has roots in our land. How is this possible when for example, Ganchar, may be not nationally-minded when everything for him is connected with this land. For some people my act is odd, but everything in us originates from childhood, from families from upbringing. You have to understand that I grew up in a large family, our life wasn't a bed of roses. I earned money myself during 5 years of study at the University, then 3 years of post-graduated study. I used to find odd jobs. I had been working far away for 13 years. From this view point one can easily explain my act, because my life was full of challenges, difficulties and with all that tempering I could endure everything. I just say what it is, it's not phraseology. If to speak about the roots, I am closely connected with all those things which are natural for every Belarusan. The past, the present and the future is connected with my country, with my family, with the people around me. We have to, maybe, stress other aspects of the national problem: we have to realise clearly what is natural for every citizen of any country. It is the disaster and national tragedy that this is unnatural for Belarusans. Are there any questions about the problem of national identify for a citizen of the United States, where all these things come like generally accepted norms. Are there such problem for the Polish and Latvians? Maybe, we live in the world where everything is vice versa, when even the fate of our country, our home is subject to discussions from the point of view «who is the most generous», and «who is the most nationally-minded». We have to come back to our natural position when the interests of our country national priorities are accepted as something natural. Thus, the major aim of any citizen should be the following: to do everything to make our country prosperous, without

any ideological meanings. Only when the nation and the people are naturally united, there would be a way to national prosperity. All post-communist countries went through the same procedure. Hardly had Poland, Czech Republic, Baltic countries realised their basic national priorities, they got rid of many problems.

— If to speak about nation unification in Belarus – to my mind, the situation is favourable, isn't it?

— I'm quite positive from the point of an analytical approach as well as from a national one. The situation is the following nowadays: old-fashioned Soviet thinking, out off from national interests from their national identity is dying out. Perhaps it sounds odd but the regime with its totally illogical actions, which humiliate Belarusan national dignity has contribute to fantastic growth and increase in national identity. Taking into consideration the fact that an integration within the frame work of that obscure «Slavonic Unity» was shattered and turned out to be bluff, exactly now there are unique grounds for finding a way to national prosperity and development. I mean everybody should realise that he has roots in Motherland, which is called our national home and he should realise it with pride. I'm sure that soon every citizen of our country will say pride that he lives in Belarus, he is a citizen of Belarus. This is the main condition for economic and spiritual growth of our nation.

— The question, which may seem trivial: who are your favourite writer, whose books influenced you a lot?

— In my childhood I used to read a lot, systematically and without any purpose. Nevertheless, my favourite book has always been – though I have a different opinion of the main character and my views upon him have changed – «Peter I» by Tolstoy.

— Among common people who say nowadays, «When will he be re-elected?» and who don't clearly understand the situation in the country there is such an opinion «Ganchar wants to be the President himself». Mr. Ganchar do you want to be the President?

— After 40 you start to re-value your position in the world and as for me, it has been changed. As any man I have always striven for self-realisation and that's why I have never hidden my boundless ambitions. It's natural. Any man should be a little over-confident, this is the most important incentive for self-fulfilment. But I believe that I'm 40 and I have gained everything, have tasted everything from the point of view of self-appraisal and self-fulfilment. Now what is important for me is to get such a situation in our country when everything will depend only on the person himself, on this or that particular individual. The end in itself is – to get such a situation. If answer your question simply and directly, I have no such an aim to become the President as in my present state I can declare myself self-fulfilled. Now the most important thing for me is complete self-fulfilment in a normal surrounding. Instead of constant, senseless struggle I would like to occupy myself with positive activities where I would be able to realise myself professionally and as a human-being. But in what kind, on what post, on what top and within the framework of what hierarchy – in doesn't matter. If it turns out that nobody wouldn't be able to perform a task except me, I'm always ready to do it. For instance, they asked me to hold the election campaign which can be hardly performed from the point of organising and technical problems. I felt that I was ready for it and together with my colleagues we did it, though it had seemed to be impossible. Now I don't have ego-centric aims: to climb up the career by any means. I don't have such a problem. But in case a particular man is needed for fulfilment of this or that task and I am required for it – it goes without saying, depending on circumstances particular aims will come forward.

— I'd like to know why you were charged not under article «plot against government» against what the prosecutor's office had warned you), not under article «embezzlement» (which could result from your personal public prosecution by Lukashenka for not paying back the credit) but under article 190 – «misappropriation of post or power»? Why did the threats become more lenient? And in this connection what is your attitude to the search on March 16 in your flat?

— If to speak about legal grounds, it's a pure legal and judicial lie. I don't care under article they instituted criminal proceedings or are planning to do it. I'm firm about it, without any reserve. I can't take seriously to the things which are obscure neither from professional view point nor from common sense. As to hesitations, it just show complete confusion and panic among those who make decisions. I won't be surprised if tomorrow I will be instituted criminal proceedings for political extremism, kindling of international hostility. I can't even imagine what could come to the head of a schizophrenic, who is sticking to the power. So-called search is one of these things. As it has nothing to do with legal procedure. It's a case of sadistic gangsterism. It's a real case of sadistic gangsterism as there is not even a hint on legal procedure, moreover during the search they did bodily harm to a woman? What to say about it?

— Your wife was hit by these «workers» in civil. How many people were there?

— They were all in civil, they introduced themselves as officials from power-control. I was astounded to see 15 people. There a slight possibility what they had aim to search – it's again on the same grounds. I don't know why but they don't loos illusions that it's possible to change the general view point or position by force, by intimidation with sadistic actions. It seems to me simply ridiculous and funny...

Interviewed by Tatsiana SNITKO

INTIMIDATION

(continued from p.1)

Balkan events have been used by another «red president» and dictator – Alexander Lukashenka. «On the quite» he decided to make short work of the opposition that had started to organise President's elections, scheduled by the Supreme Soviet of Belarus of the 13th convocation for May 16. He chose just the right time, which is really very suitable. Western counties are busy with the Serb-Kosovo conflict and Russia turns a deaf ear to numerous cases of the human rights violations in our country since Belarusan President is actually, the only ally left in its opposition to NATO, and moreover he is eager to intermediate Western countries with the return of Russian nuclear missiles to Belarus... For international community the arrest of Mikhail Chygir, a candidate for the President's elections, registered in accordance with all the legal requirements (more than 130 thousand votes for him were collected in the country) and the former prime minister of Belarus, was left almost unnoticed. He was arrested in accordance with far-fetched obviously fabricated indictments. Real political motives can be clearly seen in his arrest. Intelligence services continuously «have an eye» on the members of the Central Election Committee with Victar Ganchar at the head, to say nothing about ordinary citizens who have been taking an active part in the collection of votes and have become members of the local election committees and commissions... Numerous facts of their pursuit including psychological pursuit are given in the «Chronicle» (which can be called the «Chronicle of repressions») that is published in this issue. But it is just a drop in the ocean: thousands of Belarusan citizens are pursued today in the Republic for taking part in the preparation and organisation of the President's elections. Human rights are rudely and cynically violated. The problem is that this outrage in Belarus remains unnoticed by the international community, whose attention is caught by the Balkan crisis. TV keeps silent, newspapers too. Belarusan dictator seems not to be taken seriously comparing with other European problems. In such a way Belarusan problems are driven inside the country and are formed out to Lukashenka who stops at nothing to preserve his power.

Today Europe and Russia don't care for Belarus and its opposition, which does its best struggling with the crude dictator – «bats'ka», but tomorrow, when he has made short work of the last shoots of democracy in his country, he is likely to become, as Miloshevich, a thorn in the side of the whole world and maybe it will be too late: the chance to get rid of him by democratic, legitimate means will be hopelessly lost.

Andrei NALIVA

Events. Facts. Comments

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On March 18, the Aleinikaw family was summoned to the prosecutor's office in Dzyatlava (Grodna region). Vasil' Aleinikaw, a chairman of the local council of the BPF «Adradzhennie», his wife Antanina Aleinikava, a chairman of the local commission on presidential elections, and Uladzimir Rudzew, a secretary of that very commission on presidential elections were detained. They were officially warned.

On March 18, in the town of Mar'ina Horka (Puhavichy district, Minsk region) at about 19 o'clock p.m. the flat, where the local commission on presidential elections is based, was searched. The search was conducted by policemen with captain L.D.Nechuivitser at the head without search warrant. They confiscated printed production, personal belongings (two white-red-white flags).

On March 18, Uladzimir Shytikaw, a member of the local commission on presidential elections, was summoned to the prosecutor's office of the Gomel region. It was said in the writ that he was to give «explanations» to prosecutor Khizhanok. The «explanation» of this kind was to give V.Starchanka, who was given sub-poena on March 31. To the prosecutor's office V.Dambrowsky and A.Dawgala, the members of the local commissions on presidential elections were also called.

On March 19, in Mar'ina Gorka (Minsk region) at about 21 p.m. U.Zhawnyak was detained while collecting the signatures by policemen and brought to the Town Administration of Internal Affairs.

On March 19, Belaskow Victar, an inhabitant of Minsk, was detained in the town of Gorky (Magiliow region) while collecting the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak's nomination for presidential office. The policemen brought him to the local Administration of Internal Affairs. According to Belaskow in the Administration of Internal Affairs the policemen drew up a report of detention and that one of confiscation of 5 subscription sheets and 62 copies of fly-sheets with information about forthcoming presidential elections. After this Victar Belaskow was brought to the flat, where his mother lived. The flat was searched, some fly-sheets an subscription sheets were confiscated. Then he was brought to the regional prosecutor's office, where he was interrogated by the regional prosecutor in the presence of the chairmen of local police and local department of Committee on State Security. At the end Victar Belaskow was warned by the prosecutor, who told that «in case he had carried on his activities he would have been brought to book according to the article 61 (p.1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (plot aimed at illegal seizure of power)». But Belaskow was not given any official papers.

On March 19, A.Kaputski and I.Baikovich, the activists of the BPF «Adradzhennie» were detained in Maladziechna (Minsk region) while holding a picketing devoted to the 81st anniversary of the declaration of the Belarusan People's Republic. They were brought to the City Administration of internal Affairs and there drawn up reports. A.Kaputski and I.Baikovich were charged with breaking the article 173 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus (distribution of printed editions with breaking the established order and without imprint data). They have been kept there for three hours and ordered to come to the City Administration of Internal Affairs on March 21. The report was drawn up by lieutenant Tsimashenka.

On March 19, editor in chief of the newspaper «Vybar» (Choice) Barys Khamaida, who was accused of breaking the article 156 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus (small hooliganism), was detained in Vitsebsk. The examination carried out in the 'sobering-up' station showed that the detained was not drunk. On March 22 the judge of Zhaleznadarozhny district Afanas'ew imposed a fine upon B.Khamaida (1 mln roubles). For the same «crime» on March 18 Yuras' Karpaw, journalist of the newspaper «Vybar», was detained and drawn up a report. It should be mentioned that both of them come out as witnesses on trial under Uladzimir Pleshchanka.

On March 19, Genrykh Zasimovich, an activist of the BPF «Adradzhennie»,who lives in the village Seliavichy (Slonim district, Grodna region), was «paid a visit» by policemen from the town of Slonim at 9.45 in the morning. He collected the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak in his village. The policemen were wondered why he did it. G.Zasimovich was warned and promised «in case you don't come to your sense you will deal with the Committee on State Security (KGB)». This visit was aimed at intimidating not only G.Zasimovich but all the villagers as well. And it was effective. After this visit many people were afraid of putting their signatures for Zyanon Paznyak.

On March 19, pensioners Ya.Pyachkova and M.Galawniow were detained while collecting the signatures for Z.Paznyak in the Nadzezhdzinskaya Str. in Minsk. They were brought to the district Administration of Internal Affairs, where they spent three hours. According to them they were forced to put down the explanations of their activities and then were drawn up a report of subscription sheets' confiscation.

On March 19, Yawgen Labanovich and Alexander Yuryn were detained in Minsk while collecting the signatures for Mikhail Chygir's nomination for presidential office during the official picket organised by the Belarusan Independent Trade-union. Mrs. Karaliova was detained for the same reason at another picket of the Belarusan Independent trade-union, which was held in Zhylunovich street. All the detained people were driven to the district Departments of Internal Affairs to draw up reports.

On March 19, Uladzimir Vialichkin, chairman of local organisation of the BPF «Adradzhennie» was refused by the deputy chairman of the Brest City Executive Committee A.V.Patsevich to hold picketing on March 25 and on March 27 devoted to the anniversary of the declaration of the Belarusan People's Republic and forthcoming presidential elections scheduled for May 16.

On March 21, a picketing against the impoverishment of the Belarusan population was held in the town's park of Smargon' (Grodna region). It was organised by Aliaxei Dzergachow who held the placards saying «Are you satisfied with the lies? Adherents of the regime, stop listening to the nonsense!» etc. On March 24 the District Administration of Internal Affairs drew up a report saying «A.M.Dzergachow was the initiator of the picketing used placards insulting the constitutional system of the Republic of Belarus and the honour and dignity of the president. The administrative record of proceedings was attached by a video film. A.Dzergachow was drawn up a report and proposed to make for the judge Dzyameshchyk, who started the consideration of the case. The accused asked the judge to invite a barrister from Minsk. For this reason the trial was put off on March 30.

On March 21, Uladzimir Plyachko, who collected the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak in Brest, at about 23.00 p.m. was attacked by a man in camouflage uniform. It happened while U.Plyachko was going along the Kryvashein street near the house No13. An unknown man snatched out a subscription sheet, tore it and hit the elderly man in the face... Mr.Plyachko asserts, that he was dismissed exactly because of the membership of the BPF.

On March 22, member of the BPF «Adradzhennie» Mikola Labanaw was detained by policemen while collecting the signatures for Zyanon Paznyak in Magiliow in Astrowsky street. He was brought to Magiliow Kastrychnitsky District's Department of Internal Affairs, where he was kept until midnight. The policemen refused to inform his relatives about his arrest. Various papers and documents, including papers with signatures, fly-sheets saying «Paznyak is paving the way to Europe» and those containing the information about the Belarusan People's Republic were taken away from Mikola Labanaw. He refused to sign the report accusing him of breaking the article No 173 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus.

On March 22, chairman of the Mscislaw district's commission on presidential elections Ivan Kazarez was called to the prosecutor's office, where he was warned for taking part in the work of the aforesaid commission. He was also warned about criminal responsibility (up to 12 years of imprisonment) provided by the article 61 (p.1) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus).

On March 22, Vasil' Al'shewsky, member of the Klichaw district commision on presidential elections, was sentenced to 15 days of imprisonment. He was brought to the local Department of Internal Affairs for investigation. Then he was drawn a report and brought to court.

On March 23, the inhabitant of the Byaroza town (Brest region) Tatsiana Mikhailawna Alikhver, a pensioner and a member of the district commission on presidential elections, who works under the contract in the social sphere, received a warning: if she did not leave her activities in the district commission on presidential elections she would be dismissed.

On March 23, A.Shaternik, a member of the writers' league and a member of Minsk Central district's commission on presidential elections, was called to the district Administration of the Committee on State Security for Minsk and Minsk region, where he was warned by lieutenant G.Yu.Tartakowski. He was told about an inadmissibility of the illegal actions and was clarified, that the similar acts from his party in future, in case he did not make proper conclusions, could result in bringing a criminal action against him and entail the criminal responsibility.

On March 24,Yuras Palchewski, a member of the BPF and a member of the district commission on presidential elec-

tions, was called to the prosecutor's office of the Kastrychnitski district of Minsk. The prosecutor insisted on bringing him to administrative amenability in compliance with the article 167 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus. At the «lecture» there was colonel of the Committee on State Security present, who was interested in a problem of financing of the election commission. The prosecutor warned Y.Palchewski about possible bringing him to book.

On March 24, all the members of Minsk Leninski district commission on presidential elections with A.Zhawner at head, were called to the deputy prosecutor of the Leninski district S.S.Sokal. Seven out of twelve members of the aforesaid commission were drawn up reports for «illegal actions».

On March 25, the chairman of the BSDP «Narodnaya Gramada» Ales Serdziukow was detained by police officials in civil clothes in Magiliow at a bus station at 6.00 a.m. He was brought to the Leninski district Administration of Internal Affairs for examination, where he was kept till 11.00 a.m. The policemen referred to the information they got about the heroin containing in the Serdziukow's bag while trying to explain the reason of his detention. But during the examination they found only subscription sheets with 1000 signatures for Mikhail Chygir, which were confiscated. The note book of the detained man and his personal writing downs were confiscated as well. A.Serdziukow refused to sign the report drawn up by policemen, which accused him of breaking the article 167 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus. The consideration of this case will take place on March 31.

On March 25, members of the district commission on presidential elections N.Aganesyan, U.Vialichkin, M.Lukashuk and R.Pron'ka were «invited» to the prosecutor's office of the Leninski district of Brest, where they were led a discussion by prosecutor V.K.Masiuk. As it turned out, the Brest Town Executive Committee having received the lists of members of commissions on presidential elections, has transmitted them to the prosecutor's office. And for this reason some elections commissions have found in their mail boxes the sub-poenas.

On March 25, all the members of the district commission on presidential elections were warned in Polatsk. Prosecutor of the Polatsk district N.M.Nikulenka in his official warnings emphasised «...in case you did not stop your activities in the Polatsk commission on presidential elections .... you would be punished according to the article 167 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus (breaking the election legislature)». The members of the Polatsk commission on presidential elections have been given sub-poenas so far.

On March 25, M.Ustsinenka, a member of the local election commission was called to the Pukhavichy district's Administration of Committee on State Security in Mar'ina Gorka,. Lieutenant-colonel V.P.Rypick warned him saying «your activity contradicts current legislation and might lead to the amenability provided by the article 61 (p.1) (plot aimed at seizure of power using unconstitutional means), which is under the KGB's control». M.Ustsinenka refused to sign up the report of his official warning.

On March 25, divisional inspector I.D.Gryshchanka of the Pershamaiski district of Minsk in the presence of the witnesses drew up a report of confiscation of subscription sheets from Mrs. Nina Phiodarawna Kalyada, born in 1930.

On March 25, Larysa Viktarawna Lyaparskaya was called to the prosecutor's office of the Savetski district of Minsk. Mrs. G.A.Gryn', prosecutor's assistant, and one more man, who didn't introduce himself, interrogated the woman. They wanted to know how she got to the election commission, what she did there and how much she earned. After interrogation Larysa Viktarawna was offered to read the article 167 (p.3) of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus and not to break it. She was proposed to put down it into the examination report and to sign it. In such a way the talks with Rygor Ivanovich and Alexander Makaw were conducted, who were called the same day to the prosecutor's office.

On March 25, Ales Akhmach, a pupil of one of the Brest schools, went out in the Lenin Square with a placard saying «The 25 of March is a Will's day» at 17.00 p.m. to celebrate the anniversary of declaration of the Belarusan People's Republic. But his «picketing» was short. Some minutes after his appearance a policeman came up to him, took away the placard and forced the pupil to leave the square.

On March 27, members of the regional commissions on presidential elections were attacked at about 14.00 p.m. in Magiliow. It happened during the working meeting of the chairman of Magiliow regional commission on presidential elections U.V.Shapavalaw with representatives of the local district commissions, which was held in a private flat. The house was surrounded by policemen and then people in civilian clothes together with policemen (in all 15 men) burst into the flat. The chairman of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Magiliow regional Administration of Internal Affairs lieutenant-colonel Karpaw and investigator lieutenant Senakosaw were at the head of the group. They searched the flat and carried an examination of all those present without any explanation and without showing corresponding documents and what is more without search warrant. During the search, which lasted 5 hours, owners were not allowed to use a telephone. Everything they did was filmed. They confiscated copies of the subscription sheets (in all 258 copies), one copy of the law on presidential elections and some other documents of the local commissions on presidential elections as well as their seals and identity cards of those present. Witnesses were invited just to sign the confiscation report.

On March 28, a meeting devoted to the 81st anniversary of the declaration of the Belarusan People's Republic was held in Minsk. After the meeting detentions began. In all there were detained 8 members of the «Young Front». Among them were Ya.Afnagel, Yu.Lisowskaya, A.Sivalob, U.Antonaw, S.Karashchanka, Z.Bunchuk, L.Ambrazevich and A.Mikus. It should be said that among detained people there were four under aged). The formal reason for detention was «carrying of unregistered flags» (the flag of «Young Front»). All the arrested persons were brought to the Savetsky District's Department of Internal Affairs, where they were forced to write explanations. Then the reports were drawn up, by which the detained people were accused of breaking the article No. 167 (p.2) of the Administrative Code of the republic of Belarus. In 3 hours the under aged people were set free, but their cases were directed to the Committee on cases of under aged persons. Liskowskaya, Afnagel, Antonaw and Sivalob were brought to the special isolation ward in Akrestsin street. Then Yu.Liskowskaia was released after she gave written undertaking to come to court on March 29. The rest of the group was kept in the isolation ward till the trial.

On March 29, Ya.Afnagel, Yu.Lisowskaya, A.Sivalob, U.Antonaw, S.Karashchanka, Z.Bunchuk, L.Ambrazevich and A.Mikus stood trial at Minsk Savetsky District Court at 11 o'clock. They were accused of breaking the provisions of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus and fined for 5 million roubles everybody.

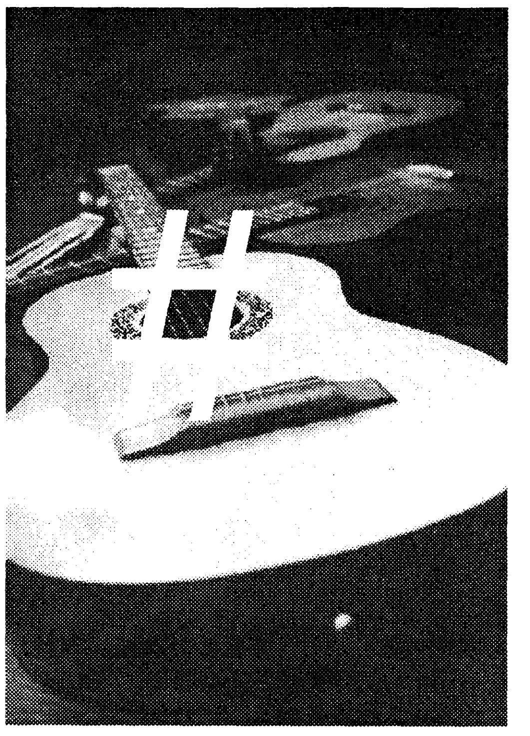
On March 29, a well-known opposition activist, a chairman of the Vitsebsk council of the Belarusan Popular Front «Vybar» Uladzimir Pleshchanka stood trial in Vitsebsk Kastrychnitsky district's Court. As it turned out during court examination Uladzimir Pleshchanka was not guilty. Judge A.Abashow had no choice but to direct the case to finish up it and to satisfy the barrister's and public defenders's demand to release U.Pleshchanka on condition of giving writing undertaking not to leave the city. So Uladzimir Pleshchanka was released straight in the court room. Considerable role in this process plaid professional barrister Uladzimir Shaikevich and public attention. The representatives of «Viasna-96» participated in the process as public defenders. Nadzeya Dudarava, an observer of the OSCE mission in Belarus, also participated in the process.

On March 30, Alexander Kaputski was called to the local Administration of Committee on State Security in Maladzechna for «making up illegal election commissions in the town of Maladzechna and in its district». He had a «talk» with assistant of the chairman of the body, mentioned above, B.P.Gladki. He was officially warned that «activities of this kind from his party in the future...will entail criminal responsibility».

On March 30, 15 unknown persons in civil clothes tried to burst into Mikhail Chygir's pre-election head-quarters. They said that they had come there to give Chygir a sub-poena. According to witnesses these people arrived at pre-election head-quarters and watched it for some time. After Mikhail Chygir had come to the office they rang the door-bell and ordered to open the door. They refused to show any documents and used bluster. They tore off the telephone wires. In spite of this activists of the election campaign managed to contact journalists using their mobile telephones. When the journalists arrived the «unknown men in civil clothes» disappeared. In some time Mikhail Chygir and his assistants left the head-quarters. At 13. 00 Chygir's car was stopped and Chygir and his assistant colonel Uladzimir Baradach were detained in the Minsk district Uruchcha. Then they were brought to the Investigative Administration of the Republic of Belarus. At 17. 00 M. Chygir made a deposition on the case, which was instituted against him and connected with credits given by «Agraprambank» at the beginning of 1990s. At about 19. 00 p.m. Uladzimir Baradach was discharged from the Investigative Administration. As for Mikhail Chygir, he was brought to the isolator ward of the Chief Administration of Internal Affairs (GUVD). He was detained for 3 days according to the article No. 119 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus (arrest of a person suspected in committing a crime) for bearing witness on the case, which had been brought according to the article No. 91 (big size misappropriation).

A Trip behind Bars

By Andrey Melnikau



Before being deported I pack my things. I take only the most necessary things. I also burn a part of my notes – in case of «shmon» (search) with confiscation.

Immediately after breakfast I shave myself – to look decent on the trial and, who knows, when I will have another possibility to shave.

Four of us go for a «walk» even the customs officer (it has been a long time since we were so «numerous»). After Christmas frosts thaw is felt in the air and the sky promises a sunny day.

They take me from the «walk». I say good-bye to my cell-mates and, convoyed, go to my cell. I take my bag, the linen. In the corridor I join a group of convicts. Here is Aleg Mizula. We wait, our faces to the wall we hand in the linen and find ourselves in the «glasses». In mine there are 8 – 9 people. It is a usual thing.

In some twenty minutes «local» convicts are taken to the court-room. Then quickly, without any search we pack into a special van for prisoners. Through the van is very crowded we all are here and Aleg sits next to me. He read his poems, shows his notes.

Cop close the door and sit to play cards...

Farewell, prison!

Without any problems we reach Lida. Here the van is packed with another batch – those who go the prison and we are transferred to a special bus: Lida – Ashmyany – Astravets – Smargon'. I see Zyanon coming into the van and cry out to salute him.

At half past four – the sun has set already – I, Aleg and one more convict are set down at Astravets custody centre.

After a formal and superficial search I find myself in a rather clean cell, the size of a «walking yard». Three people can easily walk around not running into each. A couple of two-tiered plank beds with wood planking, wood painted floor. It is hot enough in clothing but too wet. Lavatory pan. There are no wall-plugs, no water-supply.

I am the forth in the cell and occupy a vacant plank-bed below.

(Continuation. Beginning in №№ 15-28)

The inmates are two «experienced» convicts and one is here for the first time, but sentenced to 5 years, who was arrested some days before his wedding. The wedding was not to take place, the bride is pregnant and he is to be in prison for 5 years. The «experienced» ones are going to be tried in court and being recidivist they don't expect to get off easily.

We spend days and nights talking and making and drinking «chif» (very strong tea). I listen to the stories about prison, places of imprisonment, to the poems and songs I've never heard before.

I think a lot, meditate prepare for the trial. With pleasure I eat food, dishes from the local canteen. I also learn how to boil water in a plastic bottle and even ease off a toothache of one of the «experienced».

And Wednesday, December, 14 comes. I am hand-cuffed to Aleg and we are guided to a one storied building of court some hundred metres from the custody centre. There is a wonderful Belarusan landscape – trees, neat houses, the wood. Somewhere over there – Lithuania... How pleasant it is to walk on the open land!

In the court room our place is the dock. I see familiar faces: my wife, the lawyers, Aleg's mother and sister, my friend with a dictating machine. Also a fellow from the local newspaper, the rest are witnesses, officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the court. And that is all. For this small town illegal border crossings are everyday practice and don't arise any interest.

Questions to the defendants. Questions to the witnesses. We don't have questions to the court: we are not interested in the trial lasting too long.

But the court ruling is transferred to the next day. In case some directions come from the authorities.

On December, 15, Thursday the court finds us guilty in deliberate group crossing of the border, but taking into account 5 months of imprisonment and difficult family conditions of the both it applies the Article 42 (less for minor) and confines itself to a fine. The claim of the military division 2044 is left unsatisfied. Here it is – the victorious result of that hunger-strike. In the end I bring two packets of tea to my cell-mates. It's a long way to freedom for them...

Some months after my release, I had a dream: I am in prison again. And a painful thought pulsated in my mind: now there's nobody to help.

After all, maybe, everything that had happened is also nothing but a dream.

We didn't enjoy public popularity. There were no pickets or collecting signatures in my defence. I wasn't recognised as a fellow-mate by any creative union or organisation. «Belaruskaya Maladziozhnaya», that I had been advertising in prison, didn't show any interest in me after my release, then it demanded to return my journalist certificate (the formal reason for that was my interview given to «Naviny», newspaper «Narodnaya Volya» and «Svabodnyie Novosti» having kept the variation of these memories refused to publish them. The first one appeared to have an exclusive right to things like that and for the second one I'm an alien, an ordinary convict...

But, young people of Grodna didn't go on a trip because of me and I was receiving parcels for the money collected by them... but Matzko, a entrepreneur turned up my songs passing the prison by ... But Moscow Belarusans, citizens of Grodna and Gomel helped my family... But people prayed for me in churches of Vorsha... But I felt help of many people behind bars in spite of KGB... But on my release people from Grodna, Magiliow, Gomel, Brest, Minsk, Vorsha regions gave me a helping hand... For an ordinary convict that is an unusually happy continuation.

I am really very grateful to everyone who remembered me...

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